

Cortland County Area Agency on Aging

The Cortland County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is fully committed to improving the health and well-being of Cortland County seniors with high impact programs focusing on nutrition and exercise. It has allocated significant time and energy to implementing the You Can! program to enhance its goals of providing nutritious meals and offering health education and exercise programs to Cortland County senior citizens 60 years of age and older. Through its use of the You Can! tool kit, Cortland AAA has organized a large network of community organizations to promote fitness and nutrition for area seniors.

Cortland County AAA began its You Can! program by establishing key partnerships with The Cortland Standard Newspaper, Cortland Nutrition Program Senior Centers, Cortland County Health Department, Access to Independence, and the health fitness instructor for the Cortland Senior Center. It endeavored to coordinate information exchange and outreach with its partners through a variety of channels and to make sure that seniors were aware of the many opportunities available through the You Can! program.

Promoting the You Can! program became a key activity for Cortland County AAA. The press release from the You Can! tool kit was sent to The Cortland Standard, the local newspaper, promoting the nutritional program and exercise classes and sign up sheets were distributed at senior center managers meetings. Every center received a guidebook and You Can! and 10 Steps to Healthier Aging posters were distributed to each area senior center. Buttons with the You Can! logo were also created. Area senior centers staff wear the buttons to remind older adults about the program.

To encourage area senior centers to provide more exercise opportunities for seniors, chair exercise tapes were provided to every center. You Can! exercise tapes are also expected to provide additional support and two partner organizations, the Cortland County Health Education Department and Access to Independence have provided additional tapes, some of which are geared toward helping the handicap benefit from exercise.

As part of the partnership and commitment to the program, each area senior center has organized a group meeting once a week to discuss nutrition and fitness goals. The meeting is followed by an exercise class, and participants are encouraged to exercise and walk on their own outside of the class. Every senior center not only has a walking program to encourage physical fitness, but the centers take it to the next level by incorporating weekly nutritional lessons and emphasizing other forms of exercise. One senior center is sponsoring a free walk around the track at an area sports complex every Tuesday to encourage seniors to get out and get moving!

As part of its focus on nutritional wellness, Cortland County AAA has started sending out a nutrition tip to each center to be shared with its seniors. It also started Nutrition Awareness BINGO at all of the senior centers during March to celebrate National Nutrition Month.

To date, 50 seniors have enrolled in the You Can! program with every expectation that enrollment will continue to increase as more seniors become aware of the program. Those who

have been participating help by spreading the word about how the program is benefiting their health and wellbeing.

Cortland County AAA has made You Can! a reality for area seniors and truly made a difference in their lives. One of the best benefits of the You Can! tool kit is that it has cost Cortland County AAA very little money to implement and has had a tremendous impact on improving the quality of life for Cortland County seniors.